

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:  
Carol Jensen, Public Affairs Liaison  
605-720-7170  
carol.jensen@va.gov

# News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
February 24, 2012

## **Discussions Continue On Future State VA Black Hills Health Care System**

Since December 12, officials of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Black Hills Health Care System (VA BHHCS) have been holding public forums to discuss proposals for the improvement of Veterans' health care services in parts of South Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming.

The community is engaged and feedback has been thoughtful and productive.

In these public discussions, Steve DiStasio, Director VA BHHCS, emphasizes there have been no changes in the way Veterans are receiving health care from VA BHHCS. "These are proposals, nothing has been decided and no final decisions have been made," said DiStasio.

The driving factors leading to proposals for change are VA's commitment to deliver safe, high quality healthcare and to decrease travel time for Veterans and their families."

The proposals are posted online for public viewing at [www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture](http://www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture).

Proposals include the following:

- **Opening a new Hot Springs Community Based Outpatient Clinic either co-located with the Fall River Hospital, the State Veterans Home or at a free-standing site.** This VA-staffed clinic would provide the same outpatient care Veterans currently receive, but in a modern, more efficient building for providing health care, primary care, mental health, and limited specialty care. Veterans will continue to receive care from the same physicians and nurses they currently see. We want to continue to provide dialysis and would like to purchase pharmacy, laboratory and x-ray services at the Fall River Hospital.

- **A phased plan would be implemented to close the VA Hot Springs inpatient and nursing home units, operating rooms, and urgent care facilities.** Again, Veterans would still receive these medical services in Hot Springs. VA would buy the care from providers in Hot Springs and in the Veterans' local communities. This would actually provide Veterans health care even closer to their homes in South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming. The goal is to make health care, especially specialty care, more accessible, and save Veterans long-distance travel. The same VA nurses Veterans are used to seeing will be helping manage Veterans care between VA and non-VA providers.
- **Services in Rapid City would be enhanced by expanding the VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic.** Expansion in Rapid City would take care of more Veterans and would also provide x-ray, lab, pharmacy and physical therapy services - allowing VA to provide more services where more Veterans live.
- **Building a new Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program facility (also known as the Domiciliary) in Rapid City.** This new structure would be designed to meet modern health care standards and help the VA better accommodate disabled Veterans, more female Veterans, and Veterans with children. Veterans would benefit from increased access to job training and job sites, state-of-the-art home-like facilities, educational opportunities, housing options following treatment, and other community services. This new facility would allow VA to phase out use of the Hot Springs Domiciliary, which is out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **Enhance services at the Fort Meade VA Medical Center.** New operating rooms will allow the provision of surgical services into the future followed by renovation of the inpatient medical/surgical/intensive care units to enhance patient flow and staff utilization.

"Our primary goal is to preserve the best possible access to VA health care, said DiStasio.

"To do this, VA BHHCS will engage Veterans in these discussions and establish stronger partnerships with other health care agencies in communities throughout the Black Hills service area."

There is still time to have your voice heard. Veterans, family members, community and business leaders, and the general public are invited to read more about the proposals and share feedback on line at <http://www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture/>.

For further information contact:

Website: [www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture/](http://www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture/)  
 Email: [VABlackHillsFuture@va.gov](mailto:VABlackHillsFuture@va.gov)  
 Facebook: [www.facebook.com/VABlackHills](http://www.facebook.com/VABlackHills)  
 Phone: 605-720-7085